

## Calibrating the parameters: changing hearts and minds about open access monographs

Article (Published Version)

Davies, Michael C R (2014) Calibrating the parameters: changing hearts and minds about open access monographs. Insights: the UKSG journal, 27 (s1). pp. 4-6. ISSN 2048-7754

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# Calibrating the parameters: changing hearts and minds about open access monographs

The advent of open access (OA) publishing presents welcome new opportunities for reducing the barriers of cost and time to the dissemination of research work in UK universities. However, it does present some challenges to the traditional model of monograph publication in the humanities and social sciences. In common with many other academic institutions, the University of Sussex is developing policies that will permit it to embrace OA publication. This paper describes how, in doing this, Sussex is addressing the challenges associated with OA to ensure that the careers of doctoral students, academics and researchers are not affected adversely by the change in the publishing landscape for monographs both in the UK and internationally.

Should an institution support its doctoral students to publish open access (OA) monographs and in what ways can we support our research students, academics and researchers at all stages of their careers to publish OA monographs?

At Sussex, we have engaged with our DPhil students a great deal recently about our policy mandating deposit of doctoral theses in our institutional repository, Sussex Research Online (SRO). Some of our students (and their supervisors) are concerned, particularly if they want to publish a monograph, about the current policy and whether there is enough flexibility within it to allow for an embargo of their theses for an appropriate period of time. We have discovered, quite rapidly, that one size does not fit all as different expectations and requirements exist across the subject areas.

It is crucial we ensure that embargo periods are acceptable for our needs. If a student wants to get a book published and requests an embargo period to facilitate this we endeavour to be student-centric in our approach. It is important that we do not put unrealistic mandates in place that dictate you must deposit the item in SRO within, say, six or 12 months, particularly as it is likely to take 18 months to two years (or even longer) to get a book published. Furthermore, we recognize the implications that publishers' production timescales may have on our students.

The reaction from students to our policy has been mixed. There are those who can clearly see the benefit of opening up their research to a wider audience as soon as possible in their career. However, there are also those who are clearly concerned that they have to be proactive to prevent their thesis becoming instantly open access. We are beginning to lay down precedents on a case-by-case basis, which is making it easier, but it is still very important that each circumstance is considered on an individual basis.

We have to understand the pressures that early-career academics are under. The concept of getting your first book out before you can get promoted or even get a job is really important to academics in the arts, humanities and social sciences. You can see that for academics in general this is all very personal and a multi-levelled issue. It is not uncommon if you are a researcher in one of these areas that your first monograph will come out of your thesis. Additionally, there are numerous external pressures – not least the Research Excellence



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## 5 Framework (REF) – on individuals, as well as internal institutional politics that will influence the development of an academic career.

What is really required now is some joined-up thinking across institutions and between these institutions and the publishing industry. We should not risk holding back people's careers through policy and there needs to be some sort of concordat across the system to make sure the academics and researchers at University A are not being disadvantaged compared to their counterparts at University B.

At Sussex, we can best be described as 'fast followers', rather than 'pioneers', of open access. This is largely for pragmatic financial reasons. Whilst we fully support open access, we also understand the conflicting requirements of publishers and the costs that would be involved in delivering a fully gold model. I am realistic that there is not much money floating around the system so sometimes we have to have principles we can afford.

"...sometimes we have to have principles we can afford."

We also have to strike the right balance for our researchers at Sussex, as we operate on an international stage and we also want to attract the best international researchers to work at the University. The transition to OA monographs will play out in an international context, as we are currently seeing with OA journal publishing, and we need to be mindful of this global dimension when developing policy and practice.

So what may have to change, on a practical level, in order that systems and processes can support OA? Considering OA publishing more broadly, we could change our publishing habits, and be more selective and discerning about what we publish, resisting the temptation to publish five papers when two will do, but will academics embrace such an approach? The academy is generally conservative and does not like change, especially when it could be construed as obstructing the careers of academics and researchers, or stopping them from publishing what they want to, and where they want to. As senior managers, we cannot make dictats in universities as much as we would, perhaps, wish to because academics, by their very nature, are inquisitive, questioning and push the boundaries! It would not be easy to come up with a regulation in this area saying that you cannot do this or you must do that.

The challenges for Sussex in supporting OA monographs are likely to focus around balancing green and gold publication models. So, offsetting what the publishers might consider an appropriate embargo period with the requirements of funding councils to optimize the dissemination of the outputs produced by their grants – or, indeed, the requirements of individuals who need to get their work out for the development of their careers – will need to be addressed and resolved. Balancing these competing requirements and identifying the funding we would need to produce gold publications, whilst also maintaining an equitable approach across the institution, will be challenging to deliver.

From the point of view of the University's outreach and, indeed, reputation, it is in our interest as an institution to make sure that our academics are getting their monographs out there in whatever format is most suitable, and that they are being read and making an impact. However, we must avoid gold and green perhaps being perceived as 'gold' and 'bronze' – one being good and the other not so good. The University's policy is that we prioritize green wherever possible and appropriate. As an institution we also tend to look at who the publishers are. If we are very insistent on green, that might prevent people from publishing with the publishers that would be better for their career and we need to ensure that we do not unintentionally constrain the publication options available to our researchers.

"... we prioritize green wherever possible and appropriate."

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*Article received 20 December 2013; accepted 7 February 2014; published April 2014.*

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To cite this article:

Davies, M C R, Calibrating the parameters: changing hearts and minds about open access monographs, *Insights*, 2014, 27(S), 4–6; DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1629/2048-7754.141>